

BERNARD P. CARVALHO, JR.
Mayor



WALLACE REZENTES, JR.
Managing Director

COUNTY OF KAUAI

OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

News Release

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JUSTIN KOLLAR, PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
Tel (808) 241-1888
Fax (808) 241-1758

Prison sentence in DUI homicide case

LĪHU'E – James Monroe, 54, of Kīlauea, was sentenced to serve 10 years in prison for charges arising out of a 2014 drunk driving crash that left a young man dead and his father seriously injured.

Fifth Circuit Chief Judge Randal G.B. Valenciano handed down the sentence after hearing powerful statements from several family members, the defendant, Prosecuting Attorney Justin F. Kollar, and defense counsel Michael K. Soong.

Police investigation revealed that on March 4, 2014, Monroe was driving his F-350 pickup truck northbound on Kūhiō Highway near Wailapa Road when he crossed the center line, sideswiping one vehicle and causing a head-on collision with a second vehicle. The operator of the first vehicle, Cathy Farley, sustained minor injuries. The second vehicle was operated by Sam Mitzel, 28, of Kīlauea, who died at the scene. Sam's passenger was his father, Keith Mitzel, who suffered life-threatening injuries requiring emergency transport to Queen's Medical Center. A blood draw revealed that Monroe's blood alcohol level was .324 at the time of the crash, nearly four times the legal limit.

Monroe was later indicted for nine charges, including manslaughter, and earlier this year entered no contest pleas to charges of Negligent Homicide in the First Degree (a class B felony), Negligent Injury in the First Degree (a class C felony), Assault in the Third Degree (a misdemeanor), and Operating a Vehicle Under the Influence of an Intoxicant (a petty misdemeanor).

Although defense counsel sought a probation sentence, Judge Valenciano imposed the prison sentence requested by the State. Keith Mitzel addressed the Court prior to sentencing, as did Sam's mother. Both spoke of the pain their family suffered as a result of the defendant's action.

In addition to spending 10 years in prison, Monroe was ordered to pay more than \$122,000 in restitution to his victims and to reimburse the Kaua'i Police Department for the cost of the blood draw. Monroe's driver license was also revoked.

Prosecuting Attorney Justin F. Kollar stated: "We thank KPD's investigators, including lead investigator Shawn Hanna, for a top-notch report that helped us achieve these convictions. We are satisfied that this defendant will have a long time to spend in prison contemplating the vast suffering he inflicted on his victims. This case proves once again that drunk driving is truly a violent crime. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the Mitzel 'ohana."

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